

SOFTWARE

FAQ

Q Is it legal to transfer my old software to a new PC using an application such as Laplink's PCmover (reviewed right)?

A Transferring or moving your old applications to a new computer is completely legal, provided you follow the licence agreement. Software generally comes with a single-user licence to run the application on a single PC. Transferring or installing your software on a new PC isn't illegal, provided you delete the applications you've moved from your old PC. If you want to keep your old computer running with all its applications, you'll have to buy new copies of those applications for your new PC if you want to stay legal.

Remember to check the licence agreement, though, as some software ships with multiple licences, while some applications allow you to install the software on a desktop PC and a notebook, which could save you money.

David Ludlow
Deputy Editor

david@computershopper.co.uk

LAPLINK PCmover 6 Plus

★★★★

£50 inc VAT

Transferring all your files, settings and programs from an old computer to a new one is usually a tedious and time-consuming task, especially if you've built up a large collection of music, photo and video files. Windows XP has a built-in File and Settings Transfer wizard to automate the process, but this isn't capable of transferring your applications, so you'll still have to dig out all those installation CDs and serial numbers and painstakingly install them one at a time.

Thankfully, Laplink's PCmover is here to help and is more than happy to transfer your programs to a new computer. This means that, even if you're upgrading all the way from a Windows 95 machine to a PC running Vista Ultimate, you'll barely have to lift a finger.

If you want a boxed copy of PCmover with a USB2 cable for direct transfers, the software costs £50 including VAT, but you can download PCmover from www.laplink.com for £35 including VAT and use an existing network cable for transferring the data. If you don't have a network, you can use any removable media, such as a USB flash memory drive, or burn your data to CDs or DVDs. The software also supports serial and parallel cables, but the transfer rates will be so slow that we can't recommend these methods.

As you'd expect, you'll need to install PCmover on both computers. Starting with the new PC or notebook, the wizard takes a snapshot of the currently installed applications and settings. You then start the same wizard on your old computer. This gives you the opportunity to customise which settings the software transfers. Options include Microsoft Outlook settings and contacts, and Word and Internet Explorer settings. You can opt out of moving Internet Explorer or Firefox settings to try to avoid copying any spyware that might have found its way on to your PC.

Annoyingly, there's no option to choose which individual programs to transfer, so it's all or nothing. The same applies to your files, so any files you don't want on your new computer will simply have to

be deleted once the process is complete. It's also worth noting that PCmover has a few limitations. For example, anti-virus and anti-spyware programs (and any other application that installs system services, such as hard disk imaging software) will almost certainly have to be reinstalled from the original disc, along with any programs that require a serial number, and you may have to reactivate any DRM-protected files. PCmover won't transfer hardware information, either, so you'll have to install your printers, scanners and TV tuners, and possibly any associated software, manually.

We tested PCmover by transferring everything

from a Dell Inspiron 9400 notebook running Windows XP Home Edition to a PC with Vista Home Premium. PCmover reported that it needed to move a whopping 22GB of data, including 29,836 files and 95,453 settings. Overall, data is compressed by approximately 50 per cent and, despite Laplink recommending a network as the fastest

connection, the whole process took just under half an hour using the bundled USB2 cable. By contrast, the transfer was significantly slower over a 10/100MB/s network connection, taking one hour and 15 minutes.

When we checked our new PC we found that everything had gone smoothly, except that McAfee Internet Security Suite 2006 reported missing files and requested that we reinstall it. All our files and program settings had migrated correctly, and apart from the change in appearance from Windows XP to Vista, it was as if we were still using the old notebook.

Despite the amount of time and effort PCmover saves, however, it has one frustrating limitation: once you've entered the serial number on your old computer, you can't reuse the software on another one. So if you upgrade to a new computer in the future, you'll need to buy another licence in order to transfer your data and programs again. However, the USB cable doesn't become entirely redundant, as PCmover comes with a basic application for synchronising folders between two PCs, and it doesn't restrict you to the two you used for PCmover.

If you're the sort of person who'd sooner spend money than sit down and transfer data manually, PCmover will put a smile on your face. But its one-time licence makes it fairly poor value.

Jim Martin



▲ The wizard makes it easy to transfer data and programs from an old PC to a new one, but its all-or-nothing approach is a little too inflexible

SUMMARY

- ✓ Moves programs as well as settings
- ✗ Can be used only once
- ✗ Can't choose individual applications

MIGRATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 95 or later, 16MB RAM, 20GB disk space
PRODUCT CODE 5402401
SUPPLIER www.avanquest.com
DETAILS www.laplink.com



▲ You can transfer your data and programs by various means, including a network connection, USB or DVDs

AMBIENT DESIGN

ArtRage 2.0

★★★★★

£12 inc VAT

ArtRage is a simple painting application that's easy to pick up and start playing with. At the heart of this simplicity lies ArtRage's excellent interface. It forgoes standard windows conventions in favour of a clean, plain and suspiciously Mac-like appearance. Your canvas covers the whole screen, so there are no windows to resize, shape or scroll, and the tool, layer and colour palettes slide away when you get too close. Rather than bringing up a context menu, right-clicking simply enters full-screen editing mode, while the left-click is reserved for painting.

You can make your mark with all the usual implements: pencil, crayon, felt-tip pen, roller, airbrush and chalk. Each tool has further appropriate refinements. The pencil, for example, has pressure, softness and tilt-angle parameters and is excellent for quick sketches and line drawing or creating a layout for further work. The most impressive of the tools is the paintbrush. It can deliver everything from a fine fleck of paint to a great, oily dollop, and you have complete control over how much paint you apply, the pressure you use and whether the brush is cleaned after every application.

SUMMARY

- ☒ Inexpensive
- ☒ Brilliant fun
- ☒ Not as comprehensive as Painter X

PAINTING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM
 SUPPLIER www.artrage.com
 DETAILS www.artrage.com

The tools are well designed, but the real star of ArtRage is the paint itself. Colours blend on the canvas as if you were dabbing your screen with a real paintbrush. Unless instructed not to, the brush will pick up any wet paint from the canvas and gradually combine it with your chosen colour, creating subtle mid-tones that streak and combine like real oil paint. You can also manipulate the paint and other media with the palette knife tool, blending and spreading colour. The effect is stunning.

Despite its dedication to replicating real media, ArtRage has made a concession to modern graphic applications in the use of layers. This means you can create a pencil outline, then paint underneath it, keeping your guidelines visible. You can control the opacity of each layer and the way it interacts with layers above and below. This gives you much greater control over the finished image than you would get from a single canvas.

To get the best from ArtRage it helps to have a stylus input or Tablet PC – there is even a version tailored to Ultra Mobile PCs



▲ ArtRage provides the feel and enjoyment of using real paints without any of the clearing up afterwards

– but it's not absolutely necessary. Fortunately for us, neither is artistic talent. A handy tracing function lets you paint directly over one of your photos. It can even draw the paint colour from the underlying photo, so you simply have to apply the brush strokes. Alternatively, you can pin a photo to the canvas for reference or to provide inspiration.

There are other applications that do similar things, most notably Sketchbook Pro and Corel Painter X (see review on page 51), but none is even close to this price range, and none is so accessible. ArtRage might not be as comprehensive as the other titles mentioned, but its trim interface and ease of use make it an excellent choice for kids and adults that want to give computer painting a try. For the price it's excellent fun.

David McKinnon

Also consider...

MICROSOFT

Works Suite 2006

★★★★★

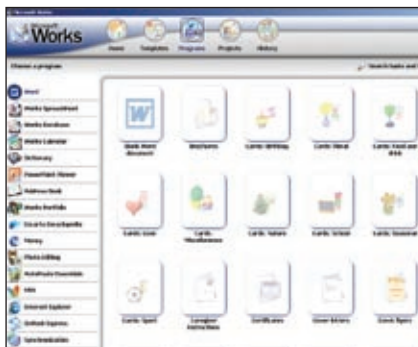
£43 inc VAT

Microsoft Office may be the obvious choice of office suite, but it's expensive for home users and is very business-focused. Microsoft has a more home-friendly range of software in Works Suite 2006, and all for well under £100.

The package contains Word, Digital Image Standard, Money, AutoRoute Essentials, Encarta and the organiser that glues them all together, Works. However, you get the older 2002 version of Word rather than the newer Word 2003. As the new version provides better security, more options for tracking document changes and mark-up features used to prepare content for professional databases, the presence of Word 2002 is a disappointment.

The other packages are well worth the money, though, and provide pretty much every function the average home user will need. Unless you intend to use your PC to run a small business, Works Suite is a stunning collection of software at a bargain price.

OFFICE SUITE Requires Windows 98 SE or later, 700MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 1.5GB disk space, Internet Explorer 6
 PRODUCT CODE B11-01360 SUPPLIER www.dabs.com DETAILS www.microsoft.com/worksuite ☒ Includes Word and handy home software such as Encarta ☒ Old version of Word FULL REVIEW Mar 2006



SONY

Vegas Movie Studio +DVD Platinum Edition 6

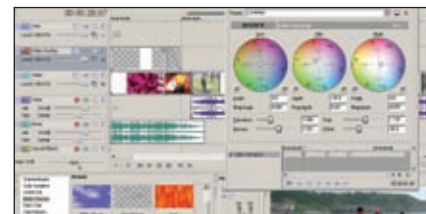
★★★★★

£59 inc VAT

Platinum Edition is new to the Vegas family and adds support for High-Definition video cameras. With a range of new effects over the standard edition, including the excellent Colour Corrector, it's well worth the extra £15.

Movie Studio has finally caught up and even surpassed its rival, Adobe's Premiere Elements.

VIDEO-EDITING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 800MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 200MB disk space
 PRODUCT CODE SPVMSDV6000 SUPPLIER www.ebuyer.com DETAILS www.sonymediasoftware.com
☒ Lots of powerful new features ☒ DVD Architect Studio might be bewildering for beginners FULL REVIEW Dec 2005



MICROSOFT Windows Live OneCare

★★★
£38 inc VAT

Windows Live OneCare is Microsoft's first attempt in years at a commercial personal security package. It includes an anti-virus and anti-spyware scanner, a firewall, a data-backup utility and a performance-tuning application. Users can install the software on up to three PCs for a year, so it's reasonably priced if you have three PCs that need protecting.

In the past we have found Microsoft's Windows Defender anti-spyware software less effective than programs from companies with longer pedigrees in security software. Windows Defender is included with OneCare, but is also available as a free download. We still recommend paying extra for CounterSpy from Sunbelt Software or Grisoft's Anti-Spyware, which cost around £10 and £15 respectively and are easier to use and more effective.

In *Labs*, *Shopper* April 2007 we ran a new email virus test on established anti-virus programs and found that favourites such as Norton AntiVirus and McAfee VirusScan were distinctly unimpressive, detecting only 75 per cent of the bad files. Over a month later we ran exactly the same test on OneCare's anti-virus scanner. This

delay gives the software a real advantage over the previous test subjects because Microsoft has had extra weeks to gather data on the viruses. However, the scanner picked up only 73 per cent of the infecting files, which is poor. It took its time when handling the malware, too, crippling our test PC even though it had a faster processor than the program's minimum requirements specified.

For the first time, Microsoft has provided a firewall that properly detects outbound connections and blocks unauthorised programs. This potentially stops Trojans and other bad programs sending out private information to the internet without your knowledge. Even the Windows Vista firewall doesn't do this. The other settings are fairly standard, though, so it's not much to get excited about, particularly as the free ZoneAlarm firewall from www.zonealarm.com does much the same but with a more attractive interface.

The performance tune-up part of the package is rather lightweight. It deletes unnecessary files,

defragments the hard disk, runs a virus scan, checks for files to back up and looks for high-priority security updates from Microsoft. You should use this option only when you don't need your PC for a while, because defragmenting is slow and makes the PC sluggish. The backup program is a handy addition to the bundle, and beats the utility included in Windows with its ability to write files to a CD. It can also copy files to an external hard disk and remind you when it's time to run the backup routine. The defragmentation and disk cleanup tools are already part of Windows, however.

The package's highlights are the reasonable firewall and backup utility, while the anti-virus and anti-spyware parts let it down considerably. You can get better, easier alternatives for free, so we advise that you steer clear of this deal.

Simon Edwards



▲ OneCare's tune-up facility reminds you to install critical Windows updates, but otherwise it's fairly lightweight

SUMMARY

- ✓ Firewall monitors outbound connections
- ✗ Ineffective virus and spyware protection
- ✗ Free alternatives are better

SECURITY SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP with Service Pack 2, 300MHz processor, 256MB RAM, internet connection, CD-RW or external hard disk for backup features
PART CODE 098-106768
SUPPLIER <http://onecare.live.com>
DETAILS www.microsoft.com

Also consider...

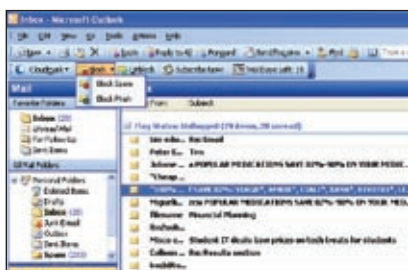
CLOUDMARK Desktop for Outlook

★★★★★
£24 inc VAT

BEST BUY Cloudmark Desktop is available for Outlook and Outlook Express. The software connects to a large database of spam messages maintained by other users, so it has a high probability of detecting spam. Any spam classifications you make are fed back into the database, improving Cloudmark's detection rates.

It was the clear winner of our anti-spam Labs test in *Shopper* December 2006.

ANTI-SPAM SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, Outlook or Outlook Express **SUPPLIER** Cloudmark 020 7100 5224 **DETAILS** www.cloudmark.com ✓ Excellent anti-spam detection ✗ Outlook/Outlook Express users only **FULL REVIEW** Dec 2006



MAGIX Audio Cleaning Lab 11 XXL

★★★★★
£45 inc VAT

BEST BUY Audio Cleaning Lab 11 XXL is a great way to convert your vinyl LPs to CD, cleaning up the sound in the process to give excellent results. This version includes all the necessary hardware you need to record directly from records to your PC. It's also a great tool for music and video production, and the audio CD-authoring tools are particularly good.

AUDIO-RESTORATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 500MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 100MB disk space **PRODUCT CODE** B000IWZXMK **SUPPLIER** www.amazon.co.uk **DETAILS** www.magix.co.uk ✓ Complete package for converting vinyl ✗ Interface a bit rough around the edges **FULL REVIEW** Jan 2007



CAKEWALK Sonar 6 Producer Edition

★★★★★
£329 inc VAT

BEST BUY Sonar 6 is the best music-production software you can buy. Its professional-quality effects and instruments go way beyond those of the competition. Other packages will appeal to certain niche groups, but if you want the best of everything Sonar still pretty much rules the roost.

MUSIC-PRODUCTION SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP, 1.3GHz processor, 256MB RAM, 1.5GB disk space **SUPPLIER** www.dolphinmusic.co.uk **DETAILS** www.cakewalk.com ✓ Comprehensive audio suite ✗ AudioSnap doesn't live up to expectations **FULL REVIEW** Mar 2007



CYBERLINK

PowerCinema 5 Digital TV Edition

★★★★

£66 inc VAT

Windows XP Media Center Edition is designed to turn a PC into the centrepiece of your living room's entertainment system. A media centre PC is pretty expensive and complicated if you just plan to use it as a glorified VCR, but this hasn't stopped various software developers coming up with their own spin on the media centre concept.

CyberLink's PowerCinema 5 is the best imitation we've seen. It comes with a PCI hybrid TV card, which tunes to either analogue or Freeview digital broadcasts and takes the gamble out of finding a compatible card. Installation went without any fuss and the friendly setup routine found the full set of Freeview channels once we had ditched the supplied mini aerial and plugged in a rooftop aerial. The card also incorporates an FM tuner and PowerCinema found 20 stations using the supplied aerial, but sound quality was poor.

On top of the usual DVD, TV, music, radio and photo options, Version 5 adds weather and news, the latter drawing on RSS newsfeeds, news-related podcasts and videos. However, it's disappointing that news isn't localised for British audiences, and that

stories are simply displayed as a webpage rather than reformatted to be legible from the sofa. The weather is localised, and includes humidity, wind speed, UV index, sunrise and sunset times plus a weekly forecast.

The restyled graphics are attractive and polished, and on the whole the interface is a pleasure to use. The internet-based electronic programme guide (EPG) is free for only 30 days but we had no trouble getting EPG data directly from the Freeview signal, despite some odd warnings during setup about "bouquets of programs". The channel guide closely mimics the one in Media Center Edition, and makes browsing programmes and scheduling recordings easy, although a bug caused some text to become garbled. Schedule clashes are handled sensibly but, unlike Media Center Edition, PowerCinema can't wake the PC from standby to record a programme.

There are a few other kinks to be ironed out. We weren't able to change the location for storing recorded video, and subtitles were on by default



▲ PowerCinema has an air of glitz to match Windows XP Media Center Edition

each time we launched the software. Music libraries can be sorted by album or artist, but tracks by a particular artist weren't arranged into albums. Clicking the DVD option produced an error stating that we had no DVD drives, although inserting a disc convinced the software otherwise. None of these problems was serious, but they took the shine off the otherwise polished interface, as did the occasional adverts for add-ons and other CyberLink products.

We found ourselves enjoying PowerCinema in spite of its blemishes. However, when you consider that Media Center features are built into Windows Vista Home Premium (*What's New, Shopper* March 2007), CyberLink might be facing a dwindling market. PowerCinema requires a remote control for best operation, but this will set you back a further £14. This, for us, makes it too expensive.

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ Well-rounded collection of features
- ✗ Too many minor glitches
- ✗ No remote control supplied

MULTIMEDIA SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP/Vista, Pentium 4 2.6GHz, 256MB RAM (512MB recommended), 200MB disk space
SUPPLIER www.cyberlink.com
DETAILS www.cyberlink.com

ROXIO
Easy Media
Creator 9 Suite

★★★★★

£44 inc VAT



This suite comes with all the media-editing tools you'll ever need. Its greatest strengths are its tight integration between all the modules and its friendly, task-oriented interface. With capable editing tools, it's great value and the best media suite you can buy, although there's not enough difference to warrant upgrading from version 8.

MEDIA SUITE Requires Windows XP/Vista, 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 1GB disk space PRODUCT CODE 227000UK
SUPPLIER www.ebuyer.com DETAILS www.dabs.com
✓ Excellent media-editing tools ✗ Little reason to upgrade from Creator 8 FULL REVIEW Jan 2007

AVANQUEST
RadioTracker 2

★★★★★

£20 inc VAT



RadioTracker 2 makes finding new music easy by downloading tracks automatically from internet radio stations. Simply select the genre of music you like and the software does the rest. A new feature enables you to pick specific tracks you want – the simple way to find a rarely heard classic.

MP3 DOWNLOAD SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 128MB RAM, 500MHz processor, 100MB disk space
SUPPLIER <http://shop.avanquest.com> DETAILS www.avanquest.com ✓ Downloads the music you want ✗ Can't delete unwanted tracks easily FULL REVIEW Feb 2007

STEGANOS
AntiVirus 2007

★★★★★

£20 inc VAT



Steganos AntiVirus uses software from Kaspersky, so you get the best anti-virus protection money can buy for a lot less money. In our recent Labs test (*Shopper* April 2007), it beat every other anti-virus application hands down. For Windows Vista, you'll have to buy Kaspersky Anti-Virus 6, as Steganos doesn't currently support Vista.

ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE Requires Windows 98 or later, 300MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 50MB disk space
SUPPLIER www.steganos.co.uk DETAILS www.steganos.co.uk
✓ Powerful protection against viruses ✗ Not compatible with Windows Vista FULL REVIEW Apr 2007



COREL Painter X

★★★★★

£205 inc VAT

We weren't entirely impressed by the previous update to Corel's painting program, Painter IX.5 (*What's New, Shopper* December 2006), but this full release builds more convincingly on the features it added. Most notable are the enhancements to Auto-Painting, a feature from the consumer edition, Painter Essentials.

Quick Clone makes it easy to apply brushstrokes over a photo, picking up its colour to create a painted reproduction. Auto-Painting, introduced in IX.5, takes this a step further: you press Play and the strokes are applied automatically. Now in Painter X you can angle Smart Strokes to follow contours in the image. We were pleasantly surprised by the results, which could sometimes be mistaken for the work of a competent human being. If you need to tweak the results, Restoration brushes let you paint back the original detail.

Painter's main focus is still on doing it yourself, and the big news here is Real Bristle brushes, which are supposed to get even closer to the real thing, aided by the 6D Art Pen (also known as Art Marker), a £60 add-on for Wacom Intuos3 or Cintiq graphics tablets. An ordinary graphics tablet

works fine too, though. Advanced users may find ways to get new and rewarding results with Real Bristle, but our impression is that it's just another set of controls to fiddle with. The new Enhanced Brush Ghost gives graphical feedback on tilt and other pen dynamics, but it should be the paint that responds meaningfully to input, not an abstract indicator.

Despite its power, the ability to evoke the real sensation of brush on canvas still eludes Painter. Nor has it quite licked the problem of producing complex brushstrokes as fast as your hand can move. Corel has achieved some good performance improvements, but unless your PC is incredibly powerful, you'll have to keep the brush size pretty small to make some brush types usable, including Real Bristle options. This isn't really a criticism, but it's something to be aware of if you dream of splashing brushfuls of colour across a large canvas.

There are few changes to the interface, which is organised neatly but with little attention to the practical needs of the user.



▲ Auto-Painting creates quite convincing artwork from photos. When painting manually, the cursor indicates pen tilt

SUMMARY

- ✓ Auto-Painting gives great instant results
- ✓ Huge depth of features
- ✗ Not as intuitive as it ought to be

PAINTING SOFTWARE Windows XP, 2000 or Vista with latest Service Pack, 512MB RAM, 280MB free disk space
PRODUCT CODE PTRXENGPCIM
SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.corel.co.uk

As well as the usual palettes, there's an endless stream of Brush Options panels, each filled with settings and sliders, and no clue as to how it might fit together to produce a desired result.

To get you started, Painter X comes with a bigger printed manual and extra video tutorials, but these are no substitute for usability. Greater understanding of the creative process is shown in new guides to aid composition, including a Divine Proportion spiral based on the golden ratio (1:1.618, or Phi), and a customisable rule-of-thirds grid.

While IX.5 had the benefit of being a free upgrade, Painter X costs more than £100. For new users, however, this program looks more attractive than ever, offering unrivalled – if flawed – painting tools along with a fair range of photo-editing features at a sensible price.

Adam Banks

Also consider...

MICROSOFT Encarta Reference Library 2007

★★★★★

£28 inc VAT



Encarta is the best encyclopedia you can get for your PC. It's easy to search and illustrates a lot of its entries with multimedia items that really help kids learn. Its articles are quite short, but external links take you to more in-depth content. It provides a stunning balance of facts and fun.

ENCYCLOPEDIA Requires 600MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 850MB disk space PRODUCT CODE 83012047

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk DETAILS www.microsoft.com

✓ Friendly interface and excellent multimedia ✗ Lacks depth in some articles FULL REVIEW Jan 2007



MR SITE Takeaway Website

★★★★★

£30 for the first year; £2.49/month from then on



Takeaway Website is everything you need to build your own website. Its price includes hosting for a year, a domain name and a website design package. There are templates for creating blogs, guest books, feedback forms and galleries, which makes this perfect for the beginner.

WEBSITE CREATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, Internet Explorer 6 SUPPLIER www.mrsite.com DETAILS www.mrsite.com ✓ Excellent value; powerful site creation tools ✗ Style options are limited FULL REVIEW Apr 2007



DISKEEPER Diskeeper 2007 Home

★★★★★

£24 inc VAT



Over time your hard disk can get untidy, with fragments of files spreading across the entire disk. Diskeeper 2007 puts them all back together again, improving disk performance. It does all this behind the scenes, so once you've configured it you'll never have to go near it again.

It's not the most exciting application, but it's essential for a smooth-running PC.

DEFRAGMENTATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP. Maximum drive size 768GB SUPPLIER www.diskeeper.com DETAILS www.diskeeper.com ✓ Efficient defragmentation ✗ Not worth upgrading from previous version FULL REVIEW Mar 2007



SERIF PagePlus X2

★★★★★

£100 inc VAT

Serif's PagePlus X2 aims to attract users by offering a wider breadth of tools than its competitors, all for an attractively low price. This version also introduces Vista support, but it's the new tools that are more exciting.

First are the options to create a PDF slideshow. This uses each page from a multi-page document as a slide. The advantage of using PDF files is that anyone on any platform with the free Adobe Reader can view the slideshows. You can add transition effects and even music and video clips. PowerPoint still has the lead when it comes to the range of effects and slide transitions, but for the occasional user PagePlus will easily do the job.

Print is increasingly being replaced by email and websites, so PagePlus X2 can now save your documents in HTML format. It's a quick and easy way to send out newsletters and other complex documents by email. It outputs HTML pages using CSS rather than tables for layout, and the sample pages we tested were correctly validated as HTML 4.01 Transitional. HTML's limitations mean that designs produced this way aren't quite as attractive as the paper

versions, but they're close enough. It's not entirely reliable, though, and the software crashed when we tried to convert the sample calendars to HTML.

For creating flowcharts, Serif has updated the drawing tools to include connector tools that link graphics within a chart, so that moving one object automatically adjusts the position of connected objects. PagePlus doesn't have the same level of tools as Visio, but for simple charts it's more than capable.

Serif has also included a large range of templates, so it's easy to get started with projects such as calendars, CD labels and business cards, as well as more conventional newsletters and business documents.

Thankfully, Serif hasn't lost sight of more basic DTP functions. The redesigned Text Styles palette shows a preview of each text style in a similar way to Office 2007, and makes it easier to change the style of multiple pieces of text. The interface has gained some



▲ PagePlus's new Media Bar makes it easy to manage your photos and import them into your documents

useful improvements as well, such as the new Media Bar, which acts as a picture browser and allows you to manage and insert images into your documents more easily.

Our main complaint is that the program's documentation doesn't explain its features very well. The printed manual tends merely to list features without explaining how they work. It also has an annoying habit of referring you to the program's online help, which often left us flicking back and forth between the manual and the web to find out how to perform a task.

Still, PagePlus works well as a general-purpose page-layout tool. Business users might prefer a more business-focused alternative, such as Microsoft's Publisher. However, PagePlus X2 is a good choice for home and small business users who need to turn their hand to a wide range of printing and publishing tasks.

Cliff Joseph

SUMMARY

- ✓ PDF slideshows
- ✓ Versatile text and graphics tools
- ✗ Poor documentation

DESKTOP PUBLISHING SOFTWARE 500MHz PC with Windows 2000, XP or Vista, 512MB RAM, 500MB disk space
DETAILS www.serif.com

MAGIX Photos on CD & DVD 6

★★

£20 inc VAT

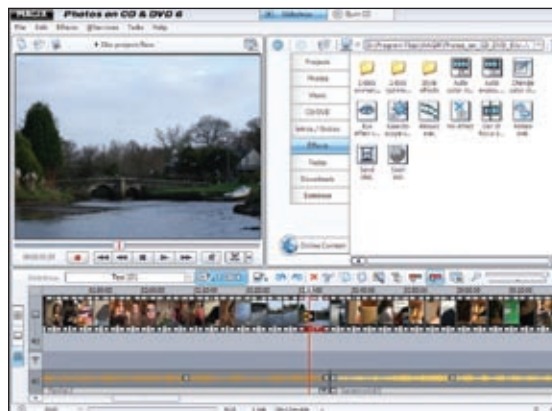
With a name as direct as Photos on CD & DVD, you might think this was a straightforward application for creating DVD slideshows. This is still the main thrust of the software, but six versions on, it's anything but straightforward.

The main application assembles slideshows in much the same way as video-editing software, with tabs to access photos, music, effects and transitions and a storyboard or timeline on which to arrange them. Slideshows can be animated with pans and zooms, exported to DVD Video disc complete with menus or uploaded to an online web gallery. Version 6 adds themed intros and outros such as a pair of theatre curtains. However, there are only three templates, and we weren't impressed when our selected intro appeared in the middle of our slideshow.

The software supports a range of video formats, although not MPEG4 and preview smoothness isn't great. As with still images, you can add elements

such as speech bubbles or eye patches to video, and a new Magnetic Objects feature tracks objects in clips so that decorations stay glued to their intended location. Sadly, the software never reached the end of a clip without our false moustaches slipping.

Three extra applications are included. Music Manager 2006 is an uninviting music playback, management and conversion program. Photo Manager 2007 is a competent photo-cataloguing program with basic image-editing tools. Goya burnR is a pared-down version of Magix' disc-burning suite, Goya (Labs, Shopper May 2007), and includes task-oriented links to various features in the suite. However, it does little to help users achieve specific tasks. Most links simply launch the relevant application and present convoluted instructions in a box that you must close before you can start.



▲ Magix' slideshow software is a victim of its own complexity

On other occasions we were presented with baffling statements or questions, one of which asked us to delete unspecified parts of our slideshow or abandon the current task. We also noticed inconsistencies, such as the fact that we could select more than one image in Overview and Timeline views but not in Storyboard view. Effects can be accessed in four ways, but three of these methods revealed different effects, only some of which worked with the others.

Ultimately, the software's overabundance of features, many of which are fairly basic, tends to result in inelegant slideshows. With patience and restraint it's possible to achieve good results, but it all feels like a bit too much effort.

Ben Pitt

SUMMARY

- ✓ Masses of features
- ✗ Messy, often confusing interface
- ✗ Produces unattractive slideshows

SLIDESHOW-CREATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP/Vista, 700MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 732MB disk space
SUPPLIER www.magix.co.uk
DETAILS www.magix.co.uk